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RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3033
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SUBJECT: KUWAIT FORCES NATO TO LOOK IN THE MIRROR

11. (U) SUMMARY: In a June 3 meeting with the North Atlantic Council (NAC), representatives from the four Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) countries pledged to work both in and out of the ICI structure with NATO on issues of common concern, such as piracy. The Kuwaiti Ambassador argued that before NATO can improve its image in the Gulf region, it must first work to improve its image at home in Allied countries. Secretary General (SYG) Jaap de Hoop Scheffer announced that the North Atlantic Council would travel to the UAE in the fall of 2009. The Secretary General joined Allies in encouraging the ICI countries to actively engage NATO through the various ICI mechanisms. END SUMMARY.

Slowly deepening relations with NATO

12. (U) At a June 3 meeting of the North Atlantic Council with the four members of NATO's Istanbul Cooperation Initiative partnership (Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, and the UAE), the Kuwaiti Ambassador stated that counter-piracy operations ALLIED PROTECTOR (NATO) and ATALANTA (EU) had energized even the non-European countries (including ICI observers Saudi Arabia and Oman) to become involved in negotiations, because -- in her words -- global problems require global solutions. She briefed with pride that a status of forces agreement with Kuwait had been finalized, and a transit agreement with NATO will hopefully be finalized soon. She thanked Germany and France for providing her Embassy with briefs on the outcomes of the Strasbourg/Kehl Summit. Although she welcomed consultations between NATO and Saudi Arabia designed to bring that country into the ICI as a partner, she admitted that Saudi Arabia and Oman will take their cooperation with NATO at their own pace and will join the ICI "in due time." The Kuwaiti Ambassador clarified that just because those countries were only observers to the ICI, they were not being left out of the pertinent conversations. She noted that both Saudi Arabia and Oman had sent representatives to a visit of the NATO Permanent Representatives (PermReps) to Bahrain in 12008. The Kuwaiti Ambassador stated that whether in or outside of the ICI structure, "willy-nilly, we will cooperate" with NATO.

Kuwait: NATO, take a look in the mirror

13. (U) In response to a call from Allies for the ICI countries to assist NATO in improving its image in the Gulf region, the Kuwaiti Ambassador bluntly responded that before the NAC tasks ICI countries to assist in this effort, Allies need to take a strong look at the Alliance's image in their own countries. She argued that NATO looks weak not only in the Middle East, but in the Euro-Atlantic area. She stated that education is a two-way street, adding that while ICI countries are willing to assist NATO in improving its image, NATO needs to do more work at home in this regard. The Kuwaiti Ambassador made a point of stressing the symbolic difference in seating the ICI representatives at a table alongside the SYG, instead of facing the Council in a more adversarial arrangement, as had been done during the first meeting in this format in November 2008.

14. (U) Norway and Italy were quick to respond that NATO's image differs from country to country, but NATO enjoys a bedrock of support from Allied populations. Italy encouraged ideas generated by the ICI countries, noting that they should not wait for Allies to "come up with all of the ideas." The SYG, who also enlisted the assistance of ICI countries in helping improve NATO's image in the Gulf, admitted that NATO should be more proactive in explaining the organization.

NAC Trip to the UAE

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15. (U) The Secretary General announced an upcoming public diplomacy trip by PermReps to the UAE in the fall of 2009.

Active ICI Engagement Encouraged

16. (U) The Secretary General encouraged the ICI countries to donate to the Afghan National Army Trust Fund. Preparing to launch a new Strategic Concept, he invited the ICI representatives to attend a seminar in July designed to examine NATO's perception in the outside world. Meanwhile, Allies called for the ICI countries to develop Individual Cooperation Programs with NATO.

Comment

17. (U) NATO Allies, usually quick to tell the ICI partners that their nations are not doing enough to promote the positive image of NATO in the Gulf, were taken aback by the Kuwaiti Ambassador's comments and the blunt manner in which they were given. However, this exchange illustrates the gradual maturing of the ICI partnership. With the visit of PermReps to the UAE later this year, Allies have another opportunity to learn first-hand about their ICI partners.
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